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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg, James Carville, Andrew Baumann and Erica Seifert

## **The Republican-Obama battleground very contested**

### **Support for Tea Party and budget comes with big price**

A new survey by Democracy Corps in 50 of the most competitive Republican-held Congressional districts – nearly all of which gave a majority to Obama in the last presidential election – shows the new Republican majority very much in play in 2012.<sup>1</sup> This survey in these battleground seats shows a significant erosion of the Republican members' vote and significant change in electoral dynamics. The votes these members are casting in support of the Tea Party agenda and House budget will come with a significant political price.

The Republican incumbents in these districts, 35 of them freshmen, remain largely unknown and appear very vulnerable in 2012.<sup>2</sup> These incumbents are in a weaker position than Democratic incumbents were even in late 2009, or Republican incumbents were in 2007 in comparable surveys conducted by Democracy Corps.

Reapportionment could affect some of these races, but note that we did not include some districts from California because of reapportionment uncertainty where Obama will run strong and we excluded districts in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas where we had good reason to believe reapportionment would remove competitive seats. While a lot can happen over the next 19 months, it is at least as likely that the partisan playing field tilts further in favor of Democrats. This poll took place right in the middle of the House Republicans' first 100 days, and shows early signs of volatility.

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<sup>1</sup> This memo is based on a survey of 1,000 likely voters in 50 battleground congressional districts conducted March 13-17, 2011. This battleground was split into two tiers of 25 districts each. These districts include 44 that were won by President Obama in 2008 and were chosen based on the 2008 presidential margin, the 2010 congressional margin and race ratings from Charlie Cook and others. Redistricting will impact things substantially, but this battleground gives a snapshot of the districts and voters, who have swung between the two parties over the last two years. The margin of error for the entire sample is +/- 3.1%. In each tier it is +/- 4.5%. The memo also includes findings from four focus groups conducted with swing voters from the battleground districts of IL-8 and PA-7, conducted in Chicago and Philadelphia March 9 and 10, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> At this point these results are instructive rather than predictive, and much will depend on the outcome of decennial redistricting in some of these districts.



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Right now, the two parties are at parity in these so-called Republican seats – and strikingly, 45 percent say that they “can’t vote to reelect” the named incumbent. Just 40 percent say they will vote to reelect their incumbents. This has already produced a congressional race that is dead-even in the battleground. After winning these seats by a collective 11 points in 2010, these Republicans now lead generic Democratic challengers by just 2 points, 44 to 46 percent, and stand well below the critical 50 percent mark.

For comparison, in July 2009, after the luster of President Obama’s inauguration had already begun to fade, the Democratic incumbents in our battleground of 40 districts still held a 6-point advantage over a generic Republican challenger. Thirty six of these 40 Democrats went on to lose their seats. What is the future of these very vulnerable incumbents?

While our next memo will report the results on the budget, but it is important to note that the battles in Congress only make this worse for Republicans. Only 46 percent of likely voters in these Republican districts support the \$61 billion of spending cuts and only 37 percent support their approach to the budget and spending. A plurality say that the more they hear from their incumbent Republican representatives, the less they like them. All this gets significantly worse after hearing from both sides on the budget.

While Democrats still have work to do with independents and swing voters, they have consolidated their base groups and are winning back Obama voters who defected in 2010. Most importantly, Democratic and Republican voters are equally enthusiastic about their preferences, a very big change from earlier trends. Indeed, there are more voters who are now open to the Democrats in 2012.

### **Key Findings**

- Since November, the vote has shifted 9 points—Republicans won these battleground districts by 11 points in November, but now win by just 2 points. The shift is partially driven by the change in the electorate, but also by shifts in voter sentiments.
- Republican incumbents are largely unknown; just 55 percent of voters know enough about them to give them a non-neutral personal favorability rating.
- These Republicans are vulnerable, more so than Democratic incumbents were in 2009 or Republican incumbents were in 2007. In even smaller battlegrounds, incumbents held 6 point advantages in both cases. A 45-to-40 percent plurality of voters say that they can’t vote to re-elect their representatives next year.



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- Under 40 percent of the electorate see their incumbents in these Republican-Obama districts as ‘on their side’ or believe that they have the right ideas on jobs and the economy and on spending and the deficit.
  - Republican incumbents are particularly vulnerable in the more upscale suburban and metropolitan districts.
  - Democratic voters and progressive base voters (non-whites, unmarried women and youth) are unified and display strong intensity for Democrats and against Republican proposals – much more than they did in 2010. Indeed, Obama’s base defectors have returned and Democratic identifiers are as consolidated as Republicans, with as many intense supporters. That is a big change. Meanwhile, Republican voters show much more lackluster support for their own party’s candidates and proposals.
  - However, independent and swing voters still lean toward Republicans on the vote and important budget issues. They remain very persuadable and Democrats have the ability to make up ground here, but they have work to do.
  - The more voters hear about the Republican plans for the budget, the less they like. Just 46 percent of voters in these Republican districts support the GOP plan to cut \$61 billion; indeed, by 48 to 40 percent, voters here are less likely to support the incumbent if they back the Tea Party agenda.
  - Voters in this Republican-Obama battleground say the more they see of the incumbent and the House Republicans, the less they like them. As you will see in the next memo from Democracy Corps, the more voters learn of the budget in a balanced debate, the less they like it.

### **The Political Environment**

President Obama won 44 of these districts, so while some of them are challenging, as a whole this is not impossible ground for Democrats. Democrats enjoy a 3-point margin in party identification (37-34) and Obama’s job approval is even at 47 percent approve, 47 percent disapprove. His personal standing is better but not great (51 percent favorable, 41 percent unfavorable), with slightly stronger numbers in the 25 most competitive seats.

The Tea Party is viewed negatively; 43 percent give the movement a cool rating (34 percent very cool) against 36 percent warm. A 48-to-40 percent plurality says that if their member of Con-



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gress supports the Tea Party agenda they would be less likely to support that member for reelection.

There is an important dynamic that we observe throughout this survey, with the Democrats in these mostly Obama districts showing strong unanimity and high intensity in favor of President Obama and the Democrats and against the Republicans and their positions – much more so than on the other side. Overall, Democratic voters have rallied behind Democrats and the President. The net warm rating for the Democratic Party among Democrats is 70, compared to net 59 for the Republican Party among Republicans.

On the other side of the coin, independents continue to show wariness towards the Democratic Party. These voters currently lean towards Republicans in party identification by a net of 9 points. And while they view both parties unfavorably, they have more ire for the Democrats, giving them a net -26 favorability rating compared to a net -9 for the Republican Party. Independents are also very sour on unions, rating unions in general at net -22 and public employee unions in particular at -23.

### **Republican Incumbents Not Well Known, Vulnerable in 2012**

These Republican incumbents remain very much unknown to the voters who elected them last November. As one college-educated man in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania noted, his Congressman, Republican Patrick Meehan, is “completely off the radar screen.” Fully 38 percent can’t give their representative a job approval rating either way, matching the 38 percent who approve of their job performance (against 25 percent who disapprove).

By comparison, in July 2009, the 40 most vulnerable Democratic incumbents had job ratings nearly 10 points better – with 47 percent approval and 28 percent disapproval. And these Republican incumbents’ personal ratings are actually worse than their job ratings at 31 percent warm/ 24 percent cool. On this scale, 45 percent don’t know enough about their representative to give him or her a non-neutral rating.

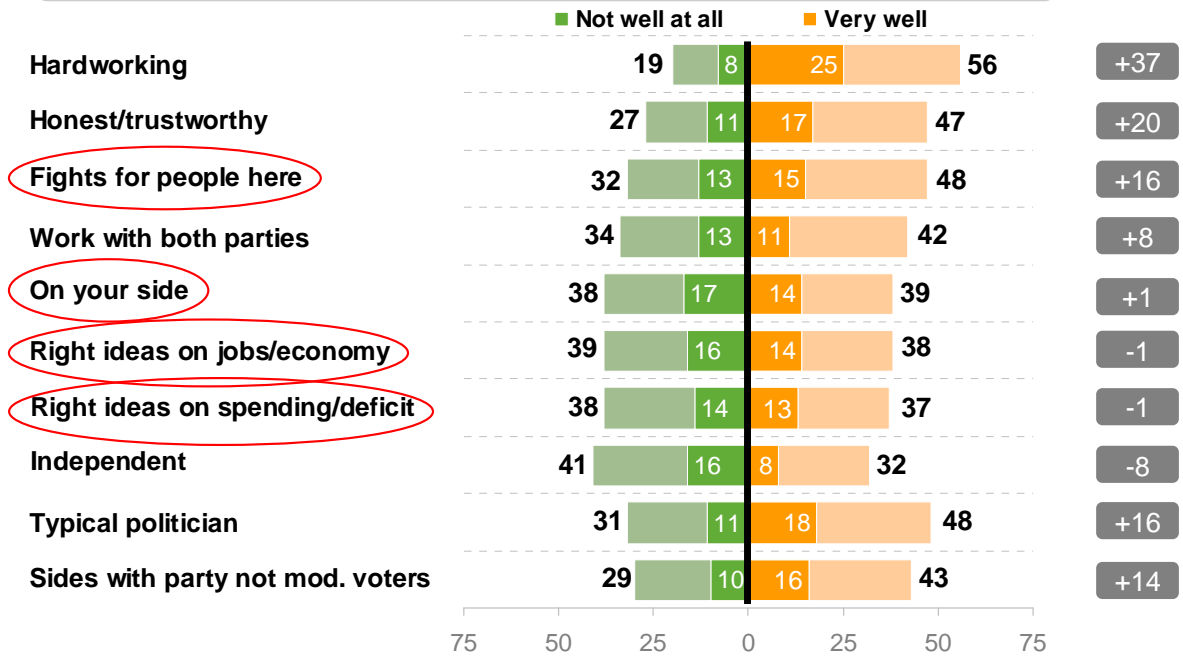
Those who can identify their representatives well enough to evaluate them see them as hard-working and honest (56 percent), and believe that they are willing to fight for the people in their districts (48 percent).



### Incumbent Traits: Hardworking and honest but typical partisan pols

Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases which people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes (HOUSE INCUMBENT) very well, well, not too well or not well at all.

Well – Not Well



However, many also see these Republicans as typical politicians (48 percent), who are beholden to the Republican Party and not to moderate voters in their districts (43 percent). And voters question whether these representatives are on their side (38 percent) and are skeptical that they have the right approach on the economy (39 percent) and the deficit (38 percent.) In regression analysis, these last three attributes are the biggest drivers of the vote and the incumbents’ approval ratings.

More important, at this early date, these voters are not inclined to reelect their incumbents. Just 40 percent report that they “will vote to reelect” the named incumbent because he/she is doing a good job, while a 45 percent plurality say they “can’t vote to reelect” the named incumbent because we need new people to fix Washington.

*It is important to note that the intensity on these is now even, or slightly in favor of the Democrats, which is a big change from what we saw in 2010 when intensity was on the side of Republicans throughout the cycle.*

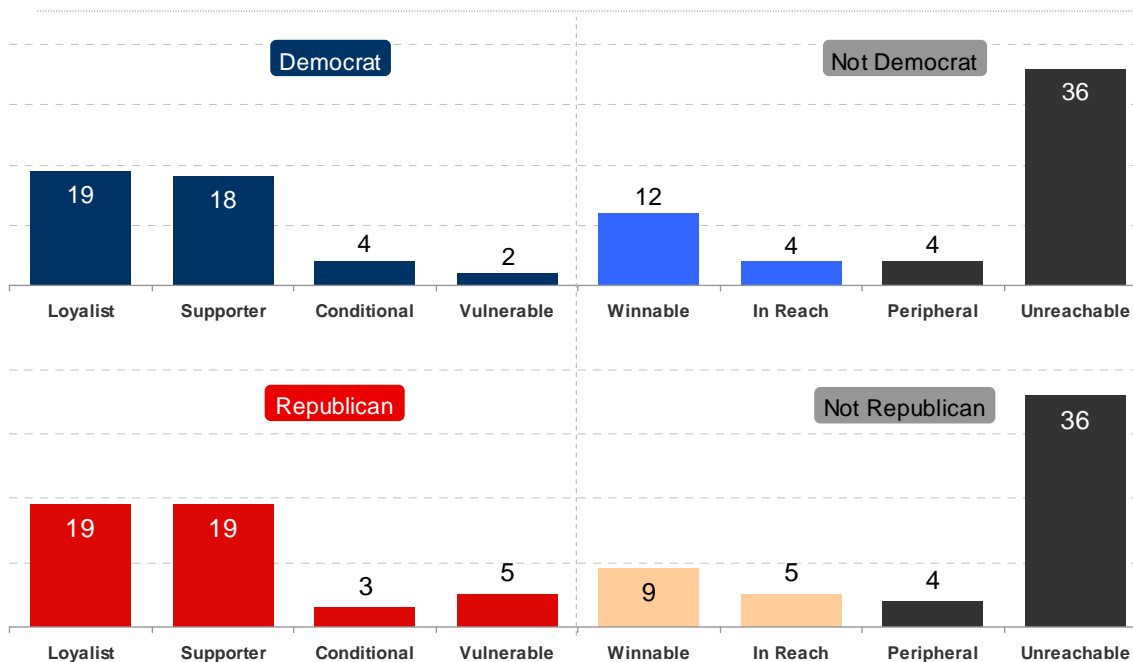


### 2012 Vote in the Battleground

The congressional race is even in the battleground. After winning these seats by a collective 11 points in 2010, these Republicans now lead generic Democratic challengers by just 2 points, 44 to 46 percent, and stand well below the critical 50 percent mark. The race is dead even in the top tier of the 25 most competitive seats—46 percent for the Democrats versus 45 percent for the Republicans. While the Republicans have a 5-point edge in the second tier of seats, they are still short of a majority.

And Democrats are in a slightly stronger position to expand their vote share. Our proprietary Voter Choice Scale algorithm, which uses multiple questions to segment the electorate into groups with varying degrees of attachment to each candidate, shows that an additional 12 percent of voters are “winnable” for Democrats, that is, the group is not now supporting the Democrat but most likely to do so come Election Day. Meanwhile, just 9 percent of voters are winnable for the Republicans.

#### Equal intensity but Democrats have more potential to expand vote



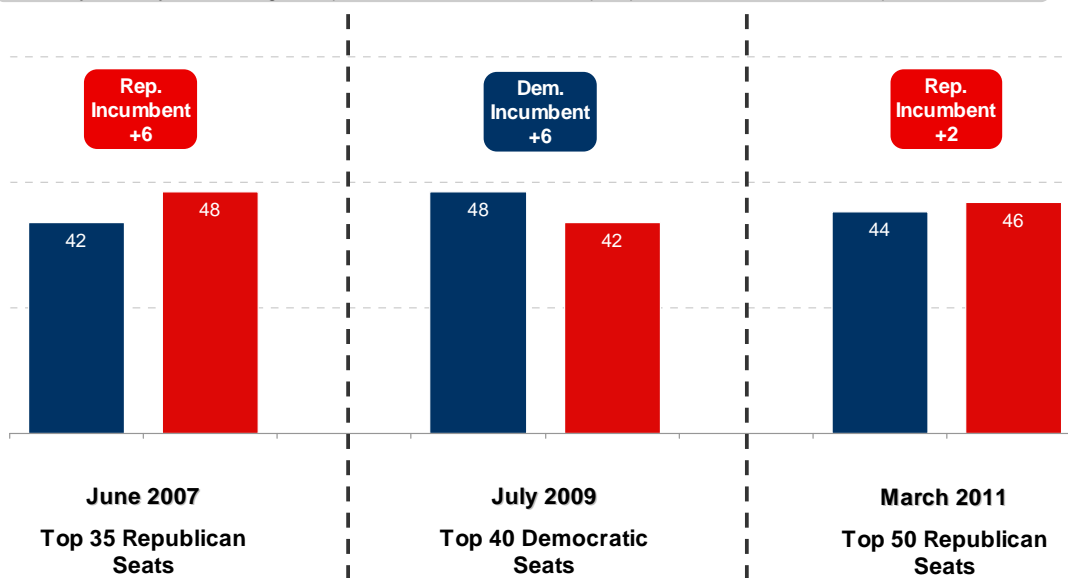
For comparison, in July 2009, after the luster of President Obama’s inauguration had already begun to fade, the Democratic incumbents in our battleground of 40 districts had a 6-point advantage over a generic Republican challenger. 36 of these 40 Democrats went on to lose their seats. And in June of 2007, in the top 35 most competitive Republican-held districts, the incumbents



also held a 6-point lead. 19 of those 35 Republicans went on to lose their seats. And of course, we know that in 2010, two-thirds of Democrats in McCain seats could not hold on. The Republicans in Obama seats are already at risk.

### GOP Incumbents doing worse than incumbents in 2007 and 2009

*I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for Congress next year, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for – (DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE) or (REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE)?*



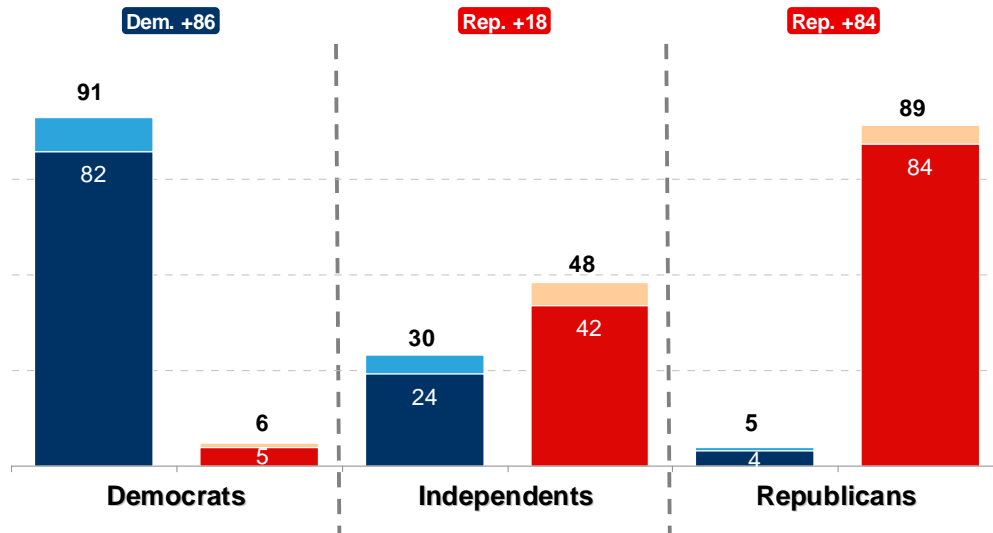
Democrats are consolidated and enthusiastic. They currently give the generic Democrat 91 percent of their vote and are adamantly united in their opposition to these incumbents. This is a marked shift from November 2010 when Democratic enthusiasm was lacking. Expanding the intensity advantage is an important goal for progressives – after all, these are mostly Obama districts so maximizing base turnout and margin will be an important part of winning many of these seats. This indicates a positive start here.

However, Democrats need to win Independents, a group they currently lose by 19 points. But there is a lot of opportunity for movement, as 25 percent of independents are “winnable” on the Voter Choice Scale and we see strong movement toward the Democrats on the vote at the end of the survey.



## Dem and GOP voters equal solidity, but independents to GOP

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*\*Note: Incumbent names were inserted with party identification. Generic challengers were inserted as "The Democratic Candidate."*

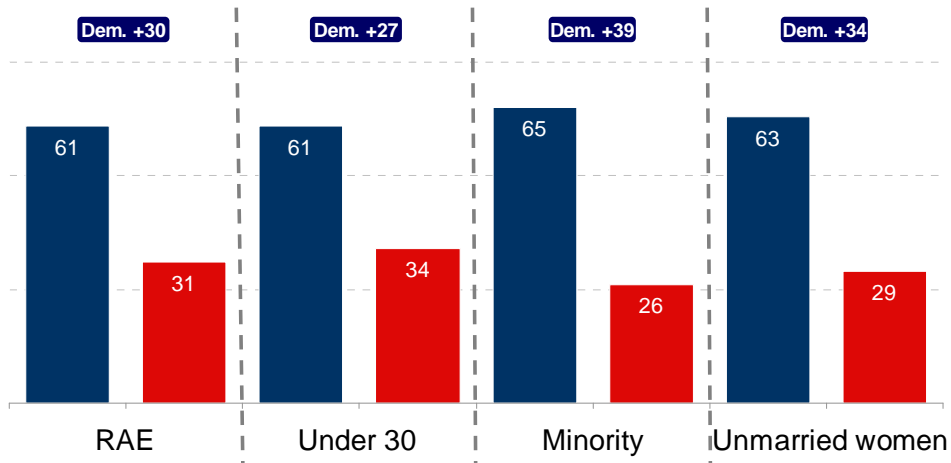
Meanwhile, base groups, some of whose support faltered for Democrats in 2010, have returned strongly to Democrats. The Rising American Electorate support Democrats by large margins. Voters under age 30 favor the unnamed Democratic candidate over the named Republican incumbent by 29 points. Unmarried women and non-white voters favor the Democratic candidate by 34 points.





## Democratic base is consolidated

*I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for Congress next year, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for – (DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE) or (REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE)?*



*\*Note: Incumbent names were inserted with party identification. Generic challengers were inserted as "The Democratic Candidate." RAE = "Rising American Electorate" and is comprised of voters under 30, minorities and unmarried women*

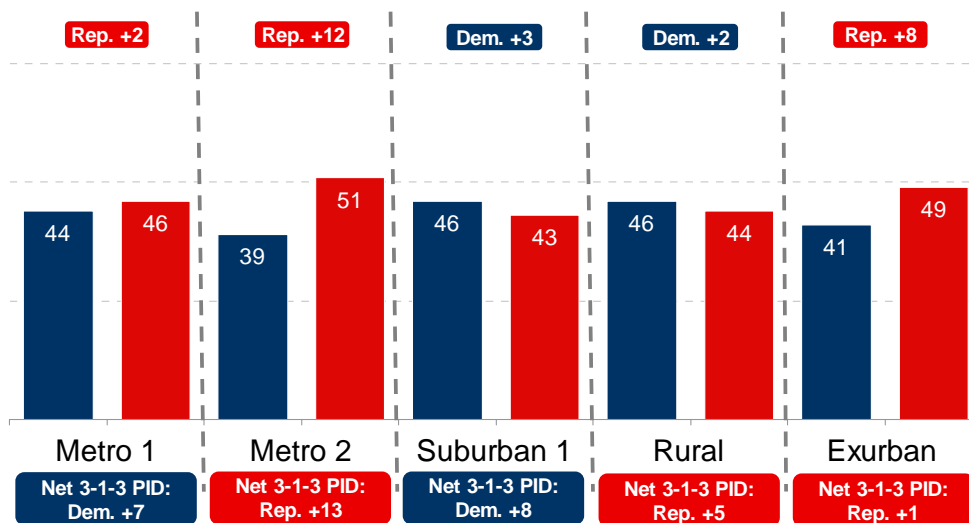
## Upscale Metro, Suburban Districts Could be Ripe Target for Democrats

Using definitions developed by Mark Gersh of NCEC Services (see Appendix 2), we divided this battleground into different groups based on typology. The results within each typology are instructive. Democrats currently have slight leads or are even in the more upscale (upper or middle income and education) metropolitan and suburban seats as well as the downscale rural districts, but trail in the more downscale metro and suburban districts and exurban seats.



## Congressional Vote: Dems have slight lead in upscale suburbs

*I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for Congress next year, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for – (DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE) or (REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE)?*



*\*Note: Incumbent names were inserted with party identification. Generic challengers were inserted as "The Democratic Candidate."*

The two best targets for Democrats may be:

- More upscale metro districts (Metro 1). Over the course of this survey, these districts move VERY strongly against the Republicans on the vote and other key measures (see below). These districts are also relatively liberal and went for Obama in large numbers in 2008
- More upscale suburban districts (Suburban 1). These voters strongly disapprove of Republican incumbents already (29 percent disapproval) and large numbers report that they will not vote to re-elect their incumbent representatives. These are also the most Democratic-leaning districts, the most friendly toward the President, and saw significant shifts on both the vote and support for the Republican budget.

While Democrats currently have a small lead in the more downscale rural districts (Rural 2), they may not prove to be quite as good targets. These are quite conservative seats where Democrats are currently over-performing partisanship. Moreover, while the rest of the districts shift toward the Democrats on the vote at the end of this survey, these districts show no movement.




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**Appendix I: 2012 Battleground District Tiers**
**2012 Battleground: Tier 1**

District	2008 Presidential vote margin	2010 Congressional vote margin	Representative	Cook PVI
CA-3	Obama +0	Rep +8	Dan Lungren	R +6
FL-22	Obama +4	Rep +8	Allen West	D +1
IL-8	Obama +13	Rep +1	Joe Walsh	R +1
IL-10	Obama +23	Rep +2	Robert Dold	D +6
IL-13	Obama +9	Rep +28	Judy Biggert	R +1
IL-17	Obama +15	Rep +10	Bobby Schilling	D +3
MN-8	Obama +8	Rep +1	Chip Cravaack	D +3
NV-3	Obama +12	Rep +1	Joe Heck	D +2
NH-1	Obama +6	Rep +11	Frank Guinta	Even
NH-2	Obama +13	Rep +1	Charlie Bass	D +3
NJ-3	Obama +5	Rep +3	Jon Runyan	R +1
NY-19	Obama +3	Rep +6	Nan Hayworth	R +3
NY-25	Obama +13	Rep +0	Ann Marie Buerkle	D +3
NC-2	Obama +5	Rep +2	Renee Ellmers	R +2
OH-1	Obama +11	Rep +7	Steve Chabot	D +1
OH-6	McCain +2	Rep +5	Bill Johnson	R +2
PA-6	Obama +17	Rep +14	Jim Gerlach	D +4
PA-7	Obama +13	Rep +11	Pat Meehan	D +3
PA-8	Obama +9	Rep + 8	Mike Fitzpatrick	D +2
PA-11	Obama +15	Rep +10	Lou Barletta	D +4
PA-15	Obama +13	Rep +15	Charlie Dent	D +2
TX-23	Obama +3	Rep +5	Francisco Canseco	R +4
TX-27	Obama +7	Rep +1	Blake Farenthold	R +2
WA-8	Obama +15	Rep +6	Dave Reichert	D +3
WI-7	Obama +13	Rep +8	Sean Duffy	D +3



## 2012 Battleground: Tier 2

District	2008 Presidential vote margin	2010 Congressional vote margin	Representative	Cook PVI
AR-1	McCain +21	Rep +9	Rick Crawford	R +8
AZ-1	McCain +10	Rep +7	Paul Gosar	R +6
CA-26	Obama +4	Rep +17	David Dreier	R +3
CA-44	Obama +1	Rep +12	Ken Calvert	R +6
CA-45	Obama +5	Rep +10	Mary Bono Mack	R +3
CO-3	McCain +2	Rep +4	Scott Tipton	R +5
FL-8	Obama +5	Rep +18	Dan Webster	R +2
FL-10	Obama +5	Rep +32	C.W. Bill Young	R +1
IL-6	Obama +13	Rep +28	Peter Roskam	Even
IL-11	Obama +8	Rep +14	Adam Kinzinger	R +1
IL-14	Obama +11	Rep +6	Randy Hultgren	R +1
IL-16	Obama +7	Rep +34	Don Manzullo	R +2
IN-9	McCain +1	Rep +10	Todd Young	R +6
MI-1	Obama +2	Rep +11	Dan Benishek	R +3
MI-11	Obama +9	Rep +20	Thad McCotter	Even
MN-3	Obama +6	Rep +22	Erik Paulsen	Even
NJ-7	Obama +1	Rep +18	Leonard Lance	R +3
NY-20	Obama +3	Rep +10	Chris Gibson	R +2
NY-24	Obama +3	Rep +6	Richard Hanna	R +2
OH-12	Obama +7	Rep +16	Patrick Tiberi	D +1
OH-15	Obama +9	Rep +14	Steve Stivers	D +1
VA-2	Obama +2	Rep +10	Scott Rigell	R +5
WA-3	Obama +6	Rep +6	Jaime Herrera	Even
WI-8	Obama +9	Rep +10	Reid Ribble	R +2
WV-1	McCain +15	Rep +0	David McKinley	R +9



**Appendix II: 2012 Battleground District Typology**

**Rural**

**Rural- 1**

New Hampshire-2  
New York-20

**Rural- 2**

Arkansas-1  
Michigan-1  
Minnesota-8  
Ohio-6  
Wisconsin-7

**Exurban**

**Exurban- 1**

Arizona-1  
Colorado-3

**Exurban- 2**

Arizona-1  
Colorado-3  
Indiana-9  
New York-24  
North Carolina-2  
Wisconsin-8  
West Virginia-1

**Suburban**

**Suburban-1**

California-3  
California-26  
California-44  
Florida-22  
Illinois-6  
Illinois-8  
Illinois-10  
Illinois-13  
Michigan-11  
Minnesota-3  
Nevada-3  
New Hampshire-1  
New Jersey-3  
New Jersey-7  
New York-19  
Ohio-12  
Pennsylvania-6  
Pennsylvania-7  
Pennsylvania-8  
Pennsylvania-15  
Washington-8  
West Virginia-1

**Suburban-2**

California-45  
Florida-10  
Pennsylvania-11

**Metro**

**Metro-1**

Florida-8  
Illinois-11  
Illinois-14  
Illinois-16  
New York-25  
Washington-3

**Metro-2**

Illinois-17  
Ohio-1  
Texas-23  
Texas-27

**Urban**

**Urban- 1**

Ohio-15  
Virginia-2